



CHAPTER 4

Black Girls and the Pipeline from Sexual Abuse to Sexual Exploitation to Prison

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No one ever believed me. No one ever protected me. I kept telling them that my stepfather touched me. They didn't listen. They kept saying I needed to be a good girl and stop being such a fast-tailed girl, like I asked for my boobs to come in at eleven. I didn't ask for any of it. Even my teachers had it out for me, telling me to stop talking back and stop being so grown, when all I was trying to do was speak up for myself. I thought then that no one cared about me. So, when I met DJ and he told me he believed me and loved me and would take care of me, I was unprepared for what would come next. I thought I was in love and that he loved me. I didn't know that this love was going to turn into the worst days of my life.

—Aja, nineteen years old¹

Girls' so-called problem behaviors, such as aggression and disruptive behaviors in school, can be associated with an abusive and traumatic home life, including the experience of sexual abuse (Dembo et al. 1995; Kroneman et al. 2009). When Black girls² experience sexual abuse, the responses of the adults around them are not always supportive. At times, the

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responses serve to vilify and stigmatize rather than address the trauma resulting from the abuse. Sexually abused girls become confused about what constitutes kindness, intimacy, and safety, which may result in greater vulnerability to subsequent exploitation by adults (e.g., pimps, traffickers) who initially seem kind, protective, and safe (Cole et al. 2016).

Research on the effects of child sexual abuse has provided insight into how it may shape one's personality and affect interactions with others and with one's environment. Social cognitive theory considers that one's behavior, intrinsic qualities, and environmental factors have a reciprocal effect on one another, shaping behavior and the determinants of the behavior (Bandura 2001). School and home are the two main sociostructural environments that shape behavior and overall development for children and youth. For some, home is a safe haven providing the support needed to develop and grow. For others, home is the place where child sexual abuse occurs, leading to struggles and misunderstandings beginning from the initial sexual encounter. For many, it is some combination of both. Girls who have been traumatized are extremely vulnerable. Aggression then becomes a coping mechanism and defense against the helplessness they experience from being repeatedly abused. This aggressive response becomes a way to ward off further harm by the abuser and the world at large. Considering social cognitive theory, this is what we see when we examine the interaction between Black girls' behavioral responses to the trauma of sexual abuse and the result of such behaviors manifested in school settings.

In this chapter, I consider the reciprocal effect of Black girls living within spaces and environments influenced by structural racism who are subjected to abuse at higher rates. I argue that there is a uniquely gendered and raced pipeline for these girls that warrants closer inspection. Here, I describe the pipeline that leads from sexual abuse to sexual exploitation to prison as an extension of the school-to-prison pipeline framework. Critical race theory utilizes the term *pipeline* to describe how structural racism in institutions, especially schools, pushes Black youth toward imprisonment (Dutil 2020). Feminist theories add an additional layer in describing how the limited social welfare infrastructure and society fail to protect vulnerable youth, especially survivors of family violence and sexual abuse, and/or queer/transgender youth (Rennison 2014).

In the spirit of self-reflexivity, I acknowledge my standpoint as a Black woman who had three adverse childhood experiences before the age of four. I wrote this chapter as someone who was once a Black girl and whose life could have gone in a different direction if home had not been a safe ha-

ven and if school had not been a place that nourished me. I acknowledge that my positionality influenced this chapter to some extent in that my experiences and expertise in working with Black girls who have survived sexual abuse and exploitation fuel my passion for this work. I explore the pipeline from sexual abuse to sexual exploitation to prison as a space of entrapment for Black girls, with the hope of disrupting this gendered and raced pipeline.

The chapter comprises a critical appraisal of the extant literature related to the intersections of Black girlhood studies, child sexual abuse, and juvenile justice in concert with my own perceptions of the scope and structure of the issues related to the pipeline from sexual abuse to sexual exploitation to prison, based on my experiences and expertise both as a Black woman and a researcher. Following a brief description of the overall context of Black girls' development, I describe the impact of sexual abuse and subsequent sexual development in the presence of such abuse. Then, I offer a frank discussion of the racialized and gendered challenges that Black girls encounter in schools and how these exacerbate the trauma they may have already experienced. This leads to their vulnerability to sexual exploitation and juvenile justice involvement as they manifest disruptive and problem behaviors, which I discuss in the next two sections. Finally, I end with a discussion of steps we all can take to dismantle the pipeline from sexual exploitation to prison.

Context

School violence prevention research has examined what is commonly termed *aggressive behaviors* as an indicator of youth violence. Scholars have examined not only physical aggression but also relational, covert, and indirect aggression among girls in particular (Chesney-Lind, Morash, and Irwin 2007; Finigan-Carr et al. 2016). In an effort to be gender balanced in the approach to violence prevention and bullying, girls' nonviolent behaviors that manifest as relational aggression have been punished in ways that contribute to long-term negative consequences. Policing girls' noncriminal behavior in schools is a unique step in their school-to-prison pipeline. Black girls are more likely to be suspended from school and to be placed in juvenile detention than their white counterparts (Brinkman, Marino, and Manning 2018; Crenshaw 2015; Hockenberry and Puzanchera 2020). In describing the racialized and gendered school-to-prison pipeline, M.

Morris (2016) described the ways Black girls are displaced from school disproportionately and enter the juvenile justice system. She described how girls' sexuality is policed in ways that marginalize them from the school environment. Placement in juvenile detention and/or in interventions designed for boys who may be persistent offenders could potentially have the unanticipated effect of extending girls' offending careers.

Rationale: Impact of Sexual Abuse

The majority of child sexual abuse occurs in the elementary school years and rarely by strangers (Amodeo et al. 2006). Typically, girls are sexually abused by a single perpetrator before or during their elementary school years as opposed to in adolescence (Sciolla et al. 2011). Approximately 40–60 percent of Black women reported some form of coercive sexual contact by the age of eighteen (Ritchie 2019; Tanis and Brown 2017). More specifically, 11 percent of Black girls in a national sample reported having been raped (Thompson, McGee, and Mays 2012). Approximately 15 percent of Black transgender K–12 girls reported being sexually assaulted, and 7 percent of them reported that the assault was committed by a teacher or school staff member (Grant, Mottet, and Tanis 2011). Numerous incidents of sexual violence have been committed by police officers in schools, youth engagement programs, and within the context of police responding to domestic and sexual violence calls (Ritchie 2017).

Child sexual abuse is associated with numerous short-term and long-term psychological problems (Leifer and Shapiro 1996; Wilson et al. 2015). It has been demonstrated that the experience of child sexual abuse affects a child's social, emotional, and cognitive development (Hassan et al. 2015). The literature suggests that many children show improvement in their psychological functioning over time, but there is still a large group (10–24 percent) who show worsening of symptoms that persist into adulthood (Grauerholz 2000; Leifer and Shapiro 1996; Wilson et al. 2015). For Black girls in particular, the relation between abuse and externalizing behavior problems persists over time, even for those who have sought mental health treatment (Wilson et al. 2015).

Despite the high incidence of sexual abuse, it often goes unreported for numerous reasons, including fear of additional violence or loss of family connection, or the belief that nothing will be done about it. Only approximately 12 percent of girls under the age of eighteen reported their

rapes to anyone because of fear of what would happen if/when they did (Black and Weisz 2003; Hanson et al. 1999). Black girls do not see teachers and school staff as safe to disclose sexual abuse and violence to, even when the schools provide teen dating violence prevention programs (Black and Weisz 2003). The younger a girl is when the sexual abuse occurs, the less likely it is that she will disclose it to an adult and the more likely it is that she will be silent about her sexuality and sexual behaviors as an adult woman (Sciolla et al. 2011).

Family violence exposure, especially if related to physical or sexual abuse, plays a huge role in Black girls' pathways to being labeled delinquent and encountering the juvenile justice system (Chesney-Lind and Okamoto 2001; Herrman and Silverstein 2012). Many girls who are subjected to abuse and neglect encounter the child welfare system, and their response to the trauma of being removed from their home coupled with the abuse they had experienced may lead to subsequent involvement in the juvenile justice system. Many of girls' "delinquent" acts can be seen as responses to the trauma of sexual abuse. In a study of juvenile justice-involved girls, Simkins and Katz (2002) found that 81 percent of the girls had experienced trauma in the form of abuse (43 percent physical; 38 percent sexual), and 38 percent reported witnessing family violence. Roughly one-third of these girls had experienced more than one type of trauma. Many of the acts which resulted in their delinquency charges can be viewed as directly in response to the violence in their lives (Chesney-Lind 2002; Simkins and Katz 2002).

Black Girls' Sexual Development

When Black girls have been victims of child sexual abuse, the need for conversations about sex and sexuality becomes even more important. Yet, sex and sexuality are rarely discussed with children in the Black community. Stigma related to these types of conversations perpetuates a culture of silence within Black communities. Many Black parents believe that teens need to first understand the responsibilities of heterosexual friendships before they can recognize what a committed romantic relationship entails (Akers et al. 2011). The primary motivation for Black parents to talk to their children (girls in this case) about sex is in response to child sexual abuse or to prevent them from experiencing molestation, assault, and/or dating violence (Akers et al. 2011). Black girls receive messages from their

families about how to dress and cover up their bodies, how to be ladylike, and not to be too “fast” (Crooks et al. 2019; Leath et al. 2020). Many of these messages draw from the politics of respectability (Crooks et al. 2019; Leath et al. 2020). These messages are also created in response to the media messages Black girls receive, especially those which focus on sexuality in a demeaning way, such as via the Jezebel stereotype (Leath et al. 2021), or in ways that suggest Black women are valued only for their physical beauty and ability to sexually gratify males (Crooks et al. 2019).

Often, when Black parents talk to their girls about sex, it is to convey the importance of self-esteem, self-respect, and demanding respect from sexual partners (Akers et al. 2011). The parents express concern about date rape and manipulation by a partner and tell their daughters that if they carry themselves in a certain way, with self-respect, then they will not choose bad partners or be taken advantage of. These conversations center more on avoiding the male gaze than on providing knowledge about sex and understanding their own sexuality (Crooks et al. 2019). This message is reinforced in school settings where educators focus more on how Black girls look in their clothes rather than on the inappropriate behavior of boys (M. Morris 2016). Even when schools provide sexual health education, the focus is on preventing pregnancy and/or protecting against sexually transmitted diseases more than on healthy relationships (Crooks et al. 2019; Jemmott, Jemmott, and Fong 1998; Lee, Cintron, and Kocher 2014). Black queer and transgender youth are left out of the discussion completely, and even when LGBTQ³ issues are discussed, it is through white framing. This focus on heteronormative sexual socialization within Black families highlights how the wider cultural norms of sexual objectification undermines the development of all Black girls’ self-esteem and body satisfaction (Crooks et al. 2019; Leath et al. 2020).

The majority of family sexual socialization research has not considered the normative experiences of Black girls, instead focusing on the risks of adolescent pregnancy and/or sexually transmitted diseases (Leath et al. 2020). Crooks et al. (2019) and Leath et al. (2020, 2021) used qualitative research to explore the diversity of sexual socialization experiences within families as it relates to Black girls’ sexual development. However, missing from this discourse has been discussion of how those who have experienced childhood sexual abuse navigate a world where they are not considered by society to be worthy of being treated as a victim of sexual violence (Helman 2018) and where families primarily focus on the risks of sexual activity.

These Black girls' understanding of sexual relationships is developing in relation to both sexualized violence and Black middle-class notions of respectability. When the former is not addressed, there is a disconnect in understanding one's self and sexuality. Many of the girls are naive about their sexual health, psychologically unprepared for healthy sexual relationships, and unaware of how to have safe sex, which makes them vulnerable to sexual exploitation as they transition through adolescence into young adulthood (Crooks et al. 2019). Even when sexual exploitation does not occur, these Black girls are more likely to acquiesce to unwanted sex with a casual partner for reasons which include lack of perceived power to refuse sex (Crosby et al. 2002; Debnam, Milam, and Finigan-Carr 2021).

Reviewing Black Girls' Racialized and Gendered Challenges in Schools

Black girls encounter unique challenges in schools because of their raced, classed, and gendered status (Evans-Winters and Esposito 2010). This includes experiences of exclusion and marginalization in schools that differ from those of Black boys and are rooted in white supremacy. The discipline directed at Black girls has focused more on their behavior and comportment. As one researcher found, they were called "loudies" because they did not adhere to the educators' views of how ladies are supposed to behave (E. Morris 2007). Views that perpetuate stereotypes of femininity as quiet, passive, and docile are rooted in whiteness and heteronormativity (Hines-Datiri and Carter Andrews 2020; Lei 2003). Educators, as a result, focus less attention on the academic progress of Black girls and more attention on their comportment (E. Morris 2007), social decorum, and even how their bodies look in their clothes (M. Morris 2016). As a result, Black girls are suspended, expelled, referred to law enforcement, and arrested on K–12 campuses at extremely high, disproportionate rates (Gibson et al. 2019; Ritchie 2019). These rigid disciplinary practices mitigate Black girls' learning and put them at risk for numerous negative behavioral risks as they develop through adolescence into adulthood.

LGBTQ youth experience disproportionately higher levels of childhood abuse (physical and sexual) as compared with their peers of any race (Baams 2018; Hunt, Vennat, and Waters 2018). Approximately 15 percent of Black transgender students in grades K–12 reported being sexually

assaulted by a teacher or school staff member (Grant et al. 2011). These youth experience discrimination and violence at school, both of which are associated with higher rates of mental health stress and substance use (Mountz 2020). LGBTQ youth are sanctioned for public displays of affection and gender-nonconforming dress, as well as held responsible when they act in self-defense to those who bully them due to their gender identity and/or sexual orientation (Mountz 2020). An understanding of how sexual abuse impacts the school-to-prison pipeline helps delineate how punitive responses and increased sanctions for behaviors, especially in schools, push LGBTQ Black girls into the pipeline as well.

Scholarship has demonstrated that the use of school punishment does not improve poor behaviors and may even increase the risks underpinning those behaviors (Corchado, Jalón, and Martínez-Arias 2017; Wolf and Kupchik 2017). Yet, Black girls in schools are routinely punished for their communication styles, their expressions, and their responses to the trauma they may have experienced (National Black Women's Justice Institute 2019). In addition to unjust punishment, Black girls are more likely to experience multiple forms of violence, such as sexual, mental, and emotional abuse at home; sexual harassment by boys in school; and discriminatory comments from adults, including school security officers (Dill 2015; Ritchie 2019). Girls who have experienced sexual abuse particularly tend to cope by manifesting aggressive, defensive, and self-protective behaviors (Simkins and Katz 2002). Sometimes these behaviors seem out of place or exaggerated in response to the actual threat presented. When Black girls exhibit these aggressive behaviors in schools, they are treated even more harshly for them, demonized, and not supported.

Zero tolerance policies negatively affect the relation between education and juvenile justice and are in conflict with best practices regarding adolescent development (American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force 2008). These policies lead to excessive suspensions, expulsions, and referrals to juvenile justice, impacting students of color at the highest rates (Crenshaw 2015; Dutil 2020). Zero tolerance policies perpetuate anti-Black discipline and are a behavioral response to white femininity, which does not align with Black girls' femininity, especially as it manifests in school environments (Hines-Datiri and Carter Andrews 2020). When used in response to aggressive behaviors manifest by Black girls who have experienced sexual abuse, zero tolerance policies set them up for experiences which impact their development into adulthood.

Black Girls' Vulnerability to Sexual Exploitation

Childhood sexual abuse increases the risks in adolescence of revictimization by an intimate partner and vulnerability to those who would take advantage of the resulting self-esteem issues (Grauerholz 2000). Child maltreatment is linked to girls' runaway behaviors, substance use, and sexual denigration (Reid 2011). These vulnerabilities are all risk factors for commercial sexual exploitation of children⁴ (Finigan-Carr et al. 2019; Kenny et al. 2020). Specifically, histories of child maltreatment put girls at high risk of commercial sexual exploitation (Naramore et al. 2017). In some cases, the vulnerabilities arising from child sexual abuse lead to manipulation by traffickers or involvement with peers associated with sex trafficking. Child sexual abuse has been consistently identified as a risk factor for future involvement in commercial sexual exploitation (Cole et al. 2016). Once exploited, girls may fear incarceration and/or involvement with the juvenile justice system, which can prevent them from seeking help from available services (Barnert et al. 2017). Race intersects with gender and class to disproportionately impact Black girls in ways that increase their vulnerability to sexual exploitation in addition to their child sexual abuse history (Butler 2015; Finigan-Carr et al. 2019).

In addition to the risks noted earlier, difficulty in school has been found to be associated with commercial sexual exploitation (Franchino-Olsen 2021; Reid and Piquero 2014). Schools have noted that they have insufficient time and/or inadequate resources to address the needs of students who are victims of or at risk for commercial sexual exploitation (Kruger et al. 2016). Transgender and gender-nonconforming youth who were physically or sexually assaulted in school were twice as likely to be forced into sex work and/or sexual exploitation (Grant et al. 2011). Predominantly poor and marginalized Black girls end up existing in a space where they are both vulnerable to sexual abuse and criminalized for prostitution. They are more likely to be adjudicated through the juvenile justice system and placed in detention, even if identified as a victim of commercial sexual exploitation (Ocen 2015).

When I first got with DJ, everything was wonderful. Anything I wanted, he gave me: new clothes, a phone. But when I moved in with him, everything changed. He told me things cost money and I had to help make some. The first time he set me up on a date, he said, "You've been giving it up to your dad for free, so might as well give it up for some cash." After that night, my life was a rollercoaster. Some days were really good with DJ, and others were full of drama, but the

lowest days were when I ended up in juvie. They picked me up for shoplifting, then kept me when they found out I was a runaway. I was there for almost three months, and DJ couldn't come see me. Being in juvie was hell. Most people treated us like criminals. Even in the so-called school, it was more like they were trying to punish us more than teach us. (Aja)

Black Girls' Juvenile Justice Involvement

It has been estimated that 70 percent of juvenile justice system-involved girls have experienced sexual or physical abuse as compared with 20 percent of their counterparts in the general population (Meichenbaum 2006). These types of abuse have been demonstrated to be important pathways for delinquent behavior in girls (Wilson et al. 2015). In the absence of discussion about sex and their burgeoning sexuality after experiencing child sexual abuse, many of these girls have been labeled as promiscuous. In reality, their experiences with violence, aggression, and victimization have had an impact on their behaviors and how they manifest in a society in which these girls are marginalized due to their race and gender (Debnam et al. 2021). It is not unusual for Black girls and young women who have been victims of sexual abuse and assault to acquiesce to unwanted sex with a partner rather than experience additional abuse (Crosby et al. 2002). Juvenile justice system-involved girls whose court histories have labeled them as exhibiting promiscuous behavior have not only experienced child sexual abuse but also reported that they “stopped saying no to boys because they didn't want to be raped again” (Simkins and Katz 2002: 1485). Running away to escape abuse and living on the streets with no viable survival options, many of these girls' coping responses are maladaptive, defensive, and self-protective (Chesney-Lind and Okamoto 2001; Kempf-Leonard and Johansson 2007; Simkins and Katz 2002). Their delinquent acts are responses to trauma, but these girls receive a juvenile justice response instead of a therapeutic one (Saar et al. 2015).

Status offenses are behaviors considered illegal because of a youth's age. Examples include truancy, running away, curfew violation, and alcohol possession. These behaviors are not crimes for adults but have legal consequences for youth who engage in them (Ehrmann, Hyland, and Puzanchera 2019). African American girls especially are subjected to serious consequences of detention resulting from being charged with a status offense, including impacts on their mental, physical, and sexual health (Kim et al. 2020). Researchers have found that once charged with a status

offense, African American girls are more likely to encounter further involvement in the juvenile justice system and become involved in problem peer behavior networks (Kim et al. 2020). Basically, status offenses lead to reconfinement down the road.

Status-offending behaviors have been found to be indications of underlying risks from trauma, sexual abuse, family conflict, and/or school challenges that could be mitigated by early intervention rather than incarceration. For example, running away from home could be remediated by family support; truancy may be due to the need for academic services or a change in school climate. Policing girls' noncriminal behavior, both in school and in the community, encourages additional unnecessary control over girls and puts them more at risk for noncompliance with school rules and policies (Chesney-Lind, Morash, and Irwin 2007). This further exacerbates the risks for these girls and sets them up for engagement with the juvenile justice system (Stevens, Morash, and Chesney-Lind 2011).

Girls account for a significantly larger proportion of status offenses than boys. Kim et al. (2020) found that a large portion of African American girls are placed in detention for status offenses such as truancy (34 percent), and higher levels of runaway behaviors are reported for girls with felony or misdemeanor offenses. Once they encounter the juvenile justice system, Black girls report higher levels of risky sex, skipping school, and past year runaway history as compared with their peers from other races/ethnicities charged with criminal offenses (Fasula et al. 2018). Black girls with status offenses bore a higher burden for reconfinement and recidivism and were more likely to be charged with technical violation of probation from their original status offense, leading to further involvement with the juvenile justice system and further biases against Black girls (Kim et al. 2020). Instead of addressing the reasons why Black girls commit status offenses in the first place, the system pulls them in deeper and exposes them to peers who are problematic.

Although boys and girls are equally likely to run away, girls have a higher arrest rate for runaway status than boys (Kempf-Leonard and Johansson 2007). Girls accounted for 54 percent of all petitioned runaway cases in 2018 (Hockenberry and Puzanchera 2020). Additionally, runaway girls are more likely to encounter sexual predators and experience sexual victimization (Kempf-Leonard and Johansson 2007; Tyler et al. 2004). Once Black girls, especially those who were sexually abused, run away, they are more likely to be forced into situations in which sex is traded as a means for survival or exploited by traffickers (Crenshaw 2015;

Dank et al. 2015). As a result, these girls may encounter the juvenile justice system for the actual runaway behavior or for criminal charges related to commercial sex trafficking.

LGBTQ youth experience heightened vulnerability to child sexual abuse, dating violence, and sexual exploitation (Dank et al. 2015), which helps explain the overrepresentation of queer and transgender youth as one of the most consistently reported variables in pathways to incarceration for girls (Mountz 2020). Queer and transgender Black girls are more likely to be charged with status offenses such as running away and truancy (Mountz 2020). For them, law enforcement presents an increased source of sanction when they run away. Queer and transgender Black girls have reported being routinely profiled by police, arrested unjustly, and subjected to increased violence and mistreatment, including sexual exploitation (Chesney-Lind and Eliason 2006; Mountz 2020).

Paternalism leads to a gendered approach when girls are involved in the juvenile justice system. This results in girls being remanded to juvenile detention for “their protection,” leading to girls with status offenses being detained more than boys and more often for moral rather than criminal reasons. African American youth are disproportionately represented in the juvenile justice system (Kim et al. 2020). Layering on the gendered lens of this system, African American girls are further disproportionately impacted and experience detention at higher rates than all other racial and ethnic groups (Ehrmann et al. 2019).

The juvenile justice system regularly criminalizes girls who are victims of abuse in response to their acting-out behaviors (Simkins and Katz 2002). Girls are more likely than boys to commit delinquent acts in response to childhood physical and sexual abuse (Herrera and McCloskey 2001). When girls who have experienced trauma enter this system, the focus is on their aggressive actions in response to the trauma they have endured as opposed to the trauma and how it may have triggered the aggressive response. In not recognizing the trauma experienced, the juvenile justice system demonstrates that it is not in the position to adequately address girls’ needs. This leads to a cycle of trauma, aggression, and inadequate treatment, which serves to drive them further into the system.

When Black girls encounter the juvenile and criminal courts, their ability to achieve future success and lead healthy lives is impeded. The time they spend in the juvenile justice system is time not spent in school (Crenshaw 2015). School absence limits their achievement and sets them up for academic failure. Furthermore, the education received while in the juvenile

justice system has an impact on how youth are integrated back into the school system once released (Annamma 2014; Leone and Fink 2017). A disproportionate number of youth remanded to juvenile detention have a history of receiving special education services, as well as suspensions and expulsions (Leone and Fink 2017). In detention-based education settings, Black girls, especially those with emotional disabilities, have noted that socializing practices, such as sitting up straight and showing proper affect, were prioritized over their academic needs (Annamma 2014).

The juvenile justice system ignores Black girls' intersectional identities, reinforces a new identity of being a criminal, and does not address their academic needs (Annamma 2014). Black girls have reported that their actual academic and emotional needs are ignored in favor of compliance with behaviors (e.g., sitting quietly with legs closed) that are not relevant to true rehabilitation and actual learning. Many of these behaviors are paternalistic and do not support varied sexual identities. These often militaristic practices lack responsiveness to racial and cultural practices, ignore Black girls' intersectional identities, and focus solely on the girls as criminals even when their offenses are minor. Queer and transgender Black girls in the juvenile justice system are concurrently invisible and hypervisible. If they are not comfortable expressing their sexual identity, they are forced to navigate the system as if they are straight. Those who are clearly queer or transgender navigate heteronormative environments segregated by gender which render them nonexistent (Mountz 2020).

Dismantling the Pipeline from Sexual Abuse to Sexual Exploitation to Prison

Typically, when scholars have discussed the needs of those who are ejected from the traditional school systems and encounter the juvenile justice system, it is gendered and raced in such a way that Black girls are left out of the discussion. Much of the school-to-prison pipeline literature examines males, particularly those of color (i.e., Black boys). When girls' issues were discussed, the focus was on white females, which leaves serious gaps in addressing the needs of Black girls. In this chapter, I provided an intersectional analysis of how Black girls, based on their experiences in schools, at home, and in society at large, encounter this pipeline. I theorize that it is the resulting pipeline from sexual abuse to sexual exploitation to prison that entraps Black girls and needs to be dismantled.

The 3P paradigm (prosecution, protection, and prevention) is utilized as a framework for addressing human trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation worldwide (Barnitz 2001). In dismantling the pipeline from sexual abuse to sexual exploitation to prison, a similar approach is warranted for Black girls. The focus would be primarily on two of the *Ps*: prevention and protection. Prevention intervention strategies should include starting discussions at younger ages about body autonomy, communicating openly with youth about making positive decisions about sex, teaching and rehearsing refusal skills for unwanted sex, and reinforcing positive values of not giving in to unwanted sex (Akers et al. 2011; Leath et al. 2020). Black girls need to be taught to have an appreciation for their bodies that emphasizes the positive and debunks the myths and stereotypes about ideal female beauty and sexuality (Crooks et al. 2019).

Prevention strategies are especially important for Black girls who have experienced child sexual abuse. Protection from the abuse is ideal; however, when already having been abused, it is imperative that they are taught that it was not their fault. Discussions about how to deal with their sexual development in light of the sexual abuse experienced that emphasize their autonomy would serve to protect Black girls from subsequent violence and vulnerability to those who would exploit them. Interventions involving parents need to address the values and assumptions inherent in the messages they convey regarding sex, sexuality, intimate partner violence, gender roles, and heterosexuality as the dominant sexual orientation (Akers et al. 2011). Girls wish they had a trusted adult to talk to them about sex and sexuality (Crooks et al. 2019). We all need to step up and break the culture of silence in order to prevent and protect Black girls from sexual abuse and exploitation.

Protecting Black girls and preventing them from entering the pipeline requires schools to use a trauma-responsive, victim-centered lens. Black girls must be seen as victims in need of saving instead of as complicit in their own trauma (Dill 2015; Helman 2018). To end sexual violence against Black girls in schools, police officers should be removed, and mechanisms should be created for students, parents, teachers, and counselors to co-create transformative approaches to school safety (Ritchie 2019). This includes the development of protocols ensuring that Black girls are protected from sexual harassment and bullying (Crenshaw 2015), eliminating practices which penalize Black girls based on their compartment (National Black Women's Justice Institute 2019), and abandoning zero tolerance disciplinary policies for victims of child sexual abuse (Saar et

al. 2015). Prevention interventions in the schools and in communities should seek to understand the factors that make youth vulnerable to sexual exploitation, in order to adequately design programs that prevent victimization, including factors related to the school environment or social norms (Crenshaw 2015; Franchino-Olsen 2021).

After-school and out-of-school programs have been found to have success with children and youth in reducing the impact of adverse childhood experiences, including the trauma of abuse (Finigan-Carr and Abel 2015). Trauma-informed approaches for children who have experienced child sexual abuse (Saar et al. 2015) and for girls who have been sexually exploited improve their motivation to seek and adhere to treatment (Laser-Maira, Peach, and Hounmenou 2019). Gender-responsive programs have therapeutic benefits for adolescent girls, on both their academic and psychosocial behaviors. These programs tend to develop safe spaces for girls, help them build community relationships, and can address their experiences with past trauma (Chesney-Lind, Morash, and Stevens 2008).

Successful gender-responsive programs designed for girls who are at risk for or have already encountered the juvenile justice system are those which specifically support their lived experiences of both racism and sexism (Chesney-Lind and Sheldon 2014) and address the developmental stages of female adolescence (Bloom and Covington 2001). These programs work with Black girls to support their empowerment by building positive, supportive relationships between the staff and the girls. These programs succeed when they do more than offer a warm body to staff the program. Staff are trained in a trauma-informed care approach, which allows them to understand the impact of trauma on Black girls and offers ways to be sensitive to their unique needs, know how to support them in making their own decisions, establish appropriate boundaries, and foster positive mentoring relationships (Brinkman et al. 2018). In addition, gender-responsive programs for juvenile justice-involved Black girls who have experienced child sexual abuse and/or exploitation need to be able to address their sexual reproductive health needs in a nonjudgmental and victim-centered manner.

Conclusions

In order to dismantle the pipeline from sexual abuse to sexual exploitation to prison for Black girls, we all need to break the culture of silence and

challenge stereotypes which further stigmatize vulnerable Black girls. It is important that the juvenile justice system intersecting with the school system commits to addressing the structural and systemic issues which lead to girls' involvement in developing into lifetime engagement with the prisons by providing gender-responsive programs and procedures appropriate for the needs of girls, especially Black girls, including those who are queer or transgender. Teachers and staff in both systems need professional development that provides information on critical and culturally responsive pedagogy that incorporates an intersectional analysis among race, gender, sexual orientation, and in some cases, disability (Annamma 2014).

As I delineated in this chapter, at the intersection of systemic, societal, and structural racism, sexism, and possibly homophobia, Black girls are less likely to experience support from adults who care, both at home and in schools. This lack of a supportive network increases Black girls' likelihood of ensnarement in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems and contributes to their vulnerability to sexual exploitation. Addressing issues of school pushout of Black girls, the frequent movements associated with system involvement that eliminate access to education as a pathway out, and being responsive to the trauma of child sexual abuse are necessary to protect these girls. Rather than policing Black girls' behaviors in ways that marginalize them from the school environment even further, we all need to engage them and provide them with dependable, caring teachers who believe in their promise.

When I got out of juvie, they made me go back home to my parents, and put me in a new high school. I was gonna give it a few weeks and then go back to DJ, but then I met Ms. S. She was the first person who saw me, like really saw me. I was seventeen, a sophomore in high school, but she treated me like a real person not a dumb girl. She told me that I was smart, and she helped me see that I could be somebody. She didn't just say it like a corny slogan. She really listened and showed me how smart I really was. I told her everything—the abuse, my life with DJ—and she didn't judge me. She worked with my social worker to get me out of my parents' house and into independent living. She helped me get my GED and got me into a job skills program. All I needed was someone to see me and believe me. (Aja)

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Notes

1. Aja's story is based on the stories of numerous Black girls I have worked with over the course of my career. As such, it is a composite case study of experiences. For a real-life example of someone impacted by the pipeline from sexual abuse to sexual exploitation to prison, look to the life of Cyntoia Brown, who was sentenced to life in prison as a teen for murdering one of her abusers.
2. Except where explicitly stated, *Black girls* refers to those of any sex or sexual orientation, including LGBTQ+ girls.
3. I use *LGBTQ* in this chapter as an initialism to represent lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and/or questioning youth. In this usage, it is inclusive of intersex, asexual, pansexual, and other nonbinary sexual orientations.
4. *Commercial sexual exploitation of children* is a term used to describe various forms of childhood sexual exploitation, including child sex trafficking and child pornography.

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